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Ban on Parking Perquisite Of U.S. Workers Debated

By Isabelle Shelton
Washington Star Staff Writer

Every day thousands of federal employees commute into the District, where they park for little or nothing. Now, members of the Congress have joined District and other local officials in calling for an end to that privilege.

Yesterday the debate over subsidized parking received an airing before a Senate committee considering a bill to eliminate the parking "perk."

On one side of the issue was the city government, which sees the end of cheap parking as a way to clean up the air and save gas at the same time. On the other were representatives of federal workers who see it as an attempt to cut employee benefits and say it will do little to reduce commuting.

In the middle are members of the Senate Operations Committee who

are considering the bill filed by Sen. Charles Percy, R-Ill.

The Percy measure would make law an executive order issued by President Carter and due to go into effect on Oct. 1. That order will require executive branch employees to pay parking rates comparable to those charged by commercial operators.

The bill would also extend that requirement to the other two branches of government, the Congress and the judiciary.

The Percy measure would apply to federal workers throughout the nation but its greatest impact would in the District. That would be especially true on Capitol Hill, where several thousand free spaces are now set aside for members of Congress and their staffs.

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Batting leadoff for those supporting the measure, District Mayor Marion S. Barry Jr. told the committee that ending the subsidized parking would save 3.7 million gallons of gasoline a year in the Washington area alone.

The mayor also predicted that ending the subsidy would eliminate over 3.5 million tons of carbon monoxide and hydrocarbon vehicle emissions from the city's air every day.

"We will all breath easier," he suggested.

Metro General Manager Richard S. Page said Metro could provide transportation to any federal workers who elected to switch from their cars. The Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments estimates such switches would add 10,000 trips a day to Metro's business, he noted.

Asked about how the additional users would affect the already crowded system, Page said Metro has

already ordered new rail cars and would be retaining 257 buses originally scheduled for disposal.

Donald M. Macintyre — national vice president of the 14th District of the American Federation of Government Employees, which represents 90,000 federal workers — took a much dimmer view of the measure.

Macintyre presented the committee with petitions signed by 11,000 workers who oppose the plan. Earlier, Sen. Charles Mathias, R-Md., brought in another 10,000 petitions against the bill, from federal employees in the Baltimore area.

The bill would "amount to a 5 percent pay cut for federal workers who drive — just as federal workers are seeing other benefits chipped away," Macintyre argued.

And it would not substantially decrease the number of workers who drive to their jobs, Macintyre suggested.

He cited figures he said showed that when the District of Columbia

raised its monthly parking fee from \$5 to \$35 "there was no noticeable reduction in the number of employees using the government's parking facilities."

That conclusion was challenged by Sen. David F. Durenberger, R-Minn., a co-sponsor of Percy's bill, who cited a 21 percent drop in auto commuters when the Canadian government began charging its employees a higher parking fee.

Sen. Pete V. Domenici, D-N.M., who has introduced a bill similar to Percy's, told the committee it was important to include executive employees in the new legislation and not to rely solely on the president's executive order.

"Presidents can change their minds, and new presidents can cancel something done by the previous president," he said.

The hearings concluded with yesterday's testimony. The committee plans to mark up the bill after the August congressional recess.